



Understanding America in/and Europe: Comparison, Circulation, and Contestation

Keynote Address, Prof. C. Richard King

Over the past two decades, scholars have sought to rework, resituate, and reframe American Studies. Pushing back against its engrained and illusory exceptionalism, they have sought to contextualize, complicate, and critique constructs like America, the American experience, and American empire. In doing so, they have embraced a variety of notions and projects, including postcolonial, postnational, transnational, hemispheric, global, and comparative. For all of their value and vision, often these reimagings remain anchored in America (as project, place, and people), a taken for granted referent and if not always fundamental core. Perhaps it cannot be otherwise, after all, if American Studies is to be viable.

Mindful of the importance of these developments, this paper considers ways of looking both ways, examining culture in motion, and studying overlapping discourses alongside one another. Drawing on work in progress in the USA, Austria, and Germany, it explores the divergent management of (shared) problems in racial states intent to imagine themselves otherwise and the power of play as the neo-imperial rubs up against postmodernism in postimperial spaces. Specifically, I discuss the figure of the neo-Nazi skinhead as transatlantic trope in German and American cinema as a means to deeper understanding of translocal whiteness, racial states, and the regulation of hate and the making and meaning of American football in Austria as an entry point to fuller appreciation of sport, identity, and power.